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UNCLAS ALMATY 002904

SIPDIS

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USDA FAS FOR ITP FOR MACKE/THOMAS, CMP/DLP WETZEL
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SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [EAGR](#) [TBIO](#) [ECON](#) [RS](#) [ETRD](#) [PGOV](#) [KZ](#) [POLITICAL](#)
SUBJECT: KAZAKHSTAN AVIAN INFLUENZA UPDATE

REF: ALMATY 2482

1. (U) Summary: After additional testing using reagents developed with U.S. assistance, the suspected human avian influenza (AI) patient in Pavlodar oblast (reftel) has not yet indicated the presence of the AI virus. The hospitalization of fifteen people in East Kazakhstan oblast has been confirmed to be a salmonella episode and not/not AI. Reports of afflicted bird populations have come from Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan and Akmolinskaya oblasts. The GOK has confirmed that the avian cases tested to date were cases of the highly pathogenic H5N1 AI strain. The affected oblasts and neighboring North Kazakhstan oblast have taken measures to quarantine the poultry industry. To date, the GOK has imposed quarantines and accepted scientific advice from U.S. specialists. The GOK has also disseminated educational information to large and small poultry producers, but has not taken strict measures limiting commerce in poultry. End Summary.

Still No Confirmed Human Case

2. (U) As reported in reftel, a team from Naval Medical Research Unit-3 was invited by CDC and the Ministry of Health to Kazakhstan to assist in developing diagnostic materials for AI. Using samples collected from the outbreak in Pavlodar oblast, the team developed both PCR (molecular-genetic) and ELISA (antibody) tests for the infection observed in Kazakhstan. None of the tests performed so far on the young man hospitalized in Pavlodar have been reactive. He is therefore not a confirmed human case.

3. (SBU) However, species-jumping with AI has been so rare that it is not known with any certainty how long it would take a notional patient to seroconvert, i.e. produce detectable antibodies. Although medical sources close to the case tell us the initial prognosis was very bleak, the Pavlodar patient is now expected to survive.

4. (SBU) In the village of Golubovka, site of the human case under investigation, CDC/CAR reports that the local authorities have made door-to-door visits to residents to check them for fever. This was a standard Soviet method of monitoring the progress of suspected dangerous "fevers of unknown origin."

5. (U) The fifteen people hospitalized near Ust-Kamenogorsk (East Kazakhstan) after eating chicken from their company cafeteria have been positively diagnosed with salmonella. AI has been excluded as a possible cause of their illness.

More Reports of Infected Birds

6. (U) There are continued reports of poultry incidents in the northern and eastern regions of the country. In addition to the Pavlodar case, 364 chickens have reportedly died in East Kazakhstan; 37 wild ducks and some domesticated birds died in Akmolinskaya oblast. It is expected that AI will be found to have caused the deaths. The GOK announced August 10 that the Pavlodar cases were definitely instances of the highly pathogenic H5N1 strain, but characterized the "epizootic situation on the republic's poultry farms" as

"favorable."

7. (U) The two new cases in Akmolinskaya oblast, which were reported in the press August 5, occurred in flocks maintained by two private households. Approximately 70 chickens and 30 ducks died. The remainder of the flocks (about 350 ducks and chickens) was reportedly culled and

quarantines were established for both villages. (Note: Akmolinskaya oblast surrounds and includes Astana, which itself has oblast status. The affected villages in Akmolinskaya oblast, Vinogradovka and Yshsart, are roughly 90 miles from the capital. End Note.)

Quarantines Imposed

18. (SBU) The authorities have taken measures to quarantine the poultry industry in the affected regions, although as yet the Ministry of Health has not confirmed which strain(s) of AI have been identified in Kazakhstan. In the affected regions, farms have been ordered to operate in a "closed mode," i.e. no movement of people, birds, feed or equipment between farms regardless of whether an incident has taken place. All of Pavlodar oblast is under this restriction; we understand that in the other oblasts only the affected villages are covered. Even in areas not affected by a strict quarantine, the Ministry of Agriculture advised producers to keep poultry indoors where possible, erect additional fences, secure their feed supplies against intrusion by wild birds and report deaths from within their flocks. Veterinary officials are checking ponds in the Pavlodar oblast for dead or ill birds. (Comment: Because of the extraordinary difficulty of completely isolating farms from contact with wild birds and the likelihood that some infections already in progress have gone unreported as yet, we are somewhat skeptical about the efficacy of the quarantine. End comment.)

19. (SBU) CDC/CAR has assisted in preparing flyers with educational materials on AI for distribution to even the smallest farms. This is intended to counteract the under-reporting of possibly infected birds and to discourage farmers from attempting to isolate sick poultry themselves without informing authorities.

110. (U) Multiple countries have taken action to prevent potentially infected Kazakhstani poultry and poultry meat from crossing their borders. Russia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Georgia have banned the importation of Kazakhstani poultry. The European Commission is expected to do so by August 12.

Comment

111. (SBU) The specialists from NMRU-3 continue to assist the GOK in identifying the virus(es) affecting birds in Kazakhstan. The additional reports in East Kazakhstan and Akmolinskaya oblasts seem to bolster the theory that the location of the outbreaks is related to the routes of migratory birds, even though the outbreak is taking place outside of the recognized migratory season. The GOK appears to have chosen a measured and low-key response. It appears to be taking necessary measures and accepting outside advice, but studiously avoiding

characterizing the problem in such a way as to cause panic at home or excessively adverse responses abroad. Post continues to follow these developments closely.

112. Dushanbe minimize considered.

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